

## Does GPRA Make a Difference?

[By Carl Moravitz]

Seventy years ago, at the climax of the Spanish Civil War, the armies of Rebel General, Emilio Nola, were advancing against Madrid. General Nola went on the radio and, in a special broadcast, called on the loyalist defenders to give up the city immediately. He said, "My troops are advancing Madrid in four columns, and, inside the city itself, I have a fifth column."

His expression has become a by-word in the language of warfare and espionage: A "**Fifth Column**," the enemy concealed within one's own lives -- the saboteur, the spy, the hostile underground movement, the resistance.

When it is **your city** that harbors the fifth column, it must be a terrible thing. You don't know who's your friend or who's your enemy. There's an atmosphere of distrust, suspicion, impending doom.

On the other hand, **if you are the one trying to take the city**, it must be great to have secret friends at work on your behalf -- a sympathetic underground with the citadel preparing the way for your coming. The Americans and the British, for example, owe a debt of gratitude to the French resistance for preparing the way for the liberation of Paris in August 1944 -- **secret friends in the city**.

As Federal managers, we are challenged from all sides to get results -- **measurable, improved results**. We are challenged to tame technology, control costs, buy smarter, outsource, and change the culture. **That's a tall**

**order!** I would not want to make the attempt without the help of "**Secret Friends.**"

The last thing you would do today would be to say that the Government Performance and Results Act -- known most generally, as the Results Act -- is your friend in times like this, **but it's true**. We need help in meeting these challenges -- we need to cultivate a relationship with someone and something that will help us get there and get there with results, improvement, and a sense of accomplishment.

GPRA can be our **Secret Friend**, if we take ownership in it and use it as our leverage for telling our story. GPRA is intended to improve confidence in government by holding agencies accountable for achieving results that affect taxpayer's lives. We are challenged to set outcome goals, measure performance and report accomplishments. It's also supposed to help Congress make better funding and oversight decisions by giving legislators credible information about agency efficiency and effectiveness. **More on that later -- the jury is still out on this!**

But, you've spent much time on the subject matter of planning, strategy, goals, and measurement in various training sessions and in your jobs. You don't need a detailed course on how to integrate planning into budget and you wouldn't expect a budget person, like myself, to say anything else but **that it's important to ensure that budget and plans are linked**. All the work on Strategic Planning that you are continually ask to develop in your jobs become

key elements in the preparation of budget and performance plan requests that your agencies submit to OMB and Congress.

You need to constantly be aware of the connection of your Plans to the larger Budget Process. Your annual budget *should* make your Strategic Plan come alive -- and annual performance plans and reports, a key component of the budget document, *should* track your progress. This is a principle reason why there is so much focus on performance outputs and outcomes. They ***become the real test*** for the realism of your Strategic Plan. If it makes a difference in peoples lives and you can track your results to demonstrate that fact -- **you have your fifth column for your entrance into the city.**

But don't think that it's that easy to develop your secret friend so it works in your favor. Most agencies collect little, if any, performance data, and what data they do collect is often of dubious reliability. The data problem is serious because with appropriate, reliable data, agencies can't set the right targets for improving performance. As little as six months ago, a survey found that 33 percent of managers reported that results-based performance measures existed for their programs. Only 38 percent said their programs used any performance measures at all. ***And the principle reason many cited for the lack of advance in this area was a belief that an investment in such measures and performance reports made a difference in how many resource they received from the Congress.***

The survey made me reflect on one of the longest running plays on Broadway, a play called "A Chorus Line." It ran continuously for several years and still plays to packed houses even today whenever it comes to town. It's a story of a group of young adults who are trying out for a chorus line of dancers in a Broadway play. They go through a whole long period of rehearsal and calisthenics to prepare themselves. They give of themselves hour after hour after hour in preparation for the selection time. They have worked, they have struggled, they have suffered. Then it's almost time for the director to make the selection for the chorus line. They know only about a third of them will be selected -- only a third of them will be selected.

And so, they're talking just prior to the selection and they begin to become a bit pessimistic about their whole career in the dance. "Well, what's the use anyway? We'll soon get old and nobody wants us when we're old. Or suppose we break a leg or a limb? We can't perform anymore; we'll become useless. **What's the use anyway?**"

And then a young woman, Diane, steps forward and says, "Oh, that's not the reason we do the dance! Not so we'll succeed. Not even so people will applaud. We do it for the love of the dance, for the love of the art, for the love of the theater, for the love of the audience. **This is the reason we give of ourselves!**" And then she sings that beautiful song . . .

**Kiss the day goodbye; the sweetness and the sorrow.**

**Wish me luck. Same to you.**

**I can't forget and I won't regret**

**What I did for love.**

That's **just** a musical -- and we're not here to talk about love; that can be covered another day in another forum -- **but that's good thinking**. What you and I are willing and ready to do for good management purposes; not for any reward we think might get from our reviewers or appropriators, **but simply because it's the right management thing to do.**

Many have maintained that GPRA -- and its components of Strategic Planning, Performance and Performance Plans -- will change the landscape of decision making in Congress on our resource requests. Appropriators will now pursue a rational balancing on resources and outcomes as they hand out money. But, decisions by appropriators are made on political basis and will continue to be made on that basis -- it's the nature of the process. And, if the **only reason** we develop Strategic Plans and associated performance measures is because we think it will make an immediate impact on the resources we get or change the way decisions are made, **we will be sorely disappointed and we'll be doing it for the wrong reason.**

We should be doing it not to be externally rewarded, but to help us manage the results and programs entrusted to us by taxpayers. We have a

vision that we believe is critical -- many of us think that our program -- which ever one it is -- is the best and most important of all in government. But do we do much to communicate that. We can all do a much better job in the way we communicate our message, set out our vision, tell our story, broadcast the difference we make in taxpayer's lives, report on the successes of the investments that have come our way, and show good managerial stewardship in the broad array of program we implement and oversee.

If we do this, then over the long haul, this will become your **Secret Friend** -- good management of programs and good stewardship on investments. **People remember this over time and will reward because we are an effective investment for a key mission area.**

Constraints, such as budget cuts are with us for the near term. Don't let all this discussion of budget surpluses fool you -- the last time I read the President's message, it told me that surpluses were all going to Social Security, as they should be. There's no slacking off in the serious stewardship and wise management of the Government's scarce resources, especially in one as important and critical as yours. I've likened the Congressional Appropriators -- powerful subcommittees -- to a Large Cage with 13 tigers in it and one canary in the back. Your job is to reach your hand into the cage, grab the canary and bring your arm out still in tact. **You need help.** You need **Secret Friends** that help you communicate the effectiveness of your mission. Ones that tell the story of good stewardship, such as a performance plan that accompanies any

request for resources.

What you are doing now -- and have been and will be doing in your jobs -- is critically important to your organization. Let the interpretation of your vision and communications through goals, expectations and results be the way others find out about the exciting mission and impact that your organization has in communities and with taxpayers. You're excited about your programs -- you have to find ways to pass that excitement on -- **GPRA can help.**

But, as you work through the process, make sure its more than process and paper. ***And the challenge I leave with you is a paraphrase from Vince Scully on statistics in baseball. He notes that "statistics are to baseball what a lamp post is to a drunk; it provides support, but little illumination."***

Make your process stronger than that . . . make it more meaningful than that . . . make it important to you!!